

# Mindful Eating

by Thich Nhat Hanh

Mindful eating is very pleasant. We sit beautifully. We are aware of the people that are sitting around us. We are aware of the food on our plates. This is a deep practice. Each morsel of food is an ambassador from the cosmos. When we pick up a piece of a vegetable, we look at it for half a second. We look mindfully to really recognize the piece of food, the piece of carrot or string bean. We should know that this is a piece of carrot or a string bean. We identify it with our mindfulness: "I know this is a piece of carrot. This is a piece of string bean." It only takes a fraction of a second.

When we are mindful, we recognize what we are picking up. When we put it into our mouth, we know what we are putting into our mouth. When we chew it, we know what we are chewing. It's very simple.

Some of us, while looking at a piece of carrot, can see the whole cosmos in it, can see the sunshine in it, can see the earth in it. It has come from the whole cosmos for our nourishment.

You may like to smile to it before you put it in your mouth. When you chew it, you are aware that you are chewing a piece of carrot. Don't put anything else into your mouth, like your projects, your worries, your fear, just put the carrot in.

And when you chew, chew only the carrot, not your projects or your ideas. You are capable of living in the present moment, in the here and the now. It is simple, but you need some training to just enjoy the piece of carrot. This is a miracle.

I often teach "orange meditation" to my students. We spend time sitting together, each enjoying an orange. Placing the orange on the palm of our hand, we look at it while breathing in and out, so that the orange becomes a reality. If we are not here, totally present, the orange isn't here either.

There are some people who eat an orange but don't really eat it. They eat their sorrow, fear, anger, past, and future. They are not really present, with body and mind united.

When you practice mindful breathing, you become truly present. If you are here, life is also here. The orange is the ambassador of life. When you look at the orange, you discover that it is nothing less than fruit growing, turning yellow, becoming orange, the acid becoming sugar. The orange tree took time to create this masterpiece.

When you are truly here, contemplating the orange, breathing and smiling, the orange becomes a miracle. It is enough to bring you a lot of happiness. You peel the orange, smell it, take a section, and put it in your mouth mindfully, fully aware of the juice on your tongue. This is eating an orange in mindfulness. It makes the miracle of life possible. It makes joy possible.

The other miracle is the Sangha, the community in which everyone is practicing in the same way. The woman sitting next to me is also practicing mindfulness while eating her breakfast. How wonderful! She is touching the food with mindfulness. She is enjoying every morsel of her breakfast, like me. We are brother and sister on the path of practice. From time to time we look at each other and smile. It is the smile of awareness. It proves that we are happy, that we are alive. It is not a diplomatic smile. It is a smile born from the ground of enlightenment, of happiness.

That smile has the power to heal. It can heal you and your friend. When you smile like that, the woman next to you will smile back. Before that, maybe her smile was not completely ripe. It was ninety percent ripe. If you offer her your mindful smile, you will give her the energy to smile one hundred percent.

When she is smiling, healing begins to take place in her. You are very important for her transformation and healing. That is why the presence of brothers and sisters in the practice is so important. This is also why we don't talk during breakfast. If we talk about the weather or the political situation in the Middle East, we can never say enough.

We need the silence to enjoy our own presence and the presence of our Dharma brothers and sisters. This kind of silence is very alive, powerful, nourishing, and transforming. It is not oppressive or sad. Together we can create this kind of noble silence.

Sometimes it is described as "thundering silence" because it is so powerful.

Source: <http://chetday.com/mindfuleating.htm>

